DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 237 797 CE 800 051

AUTHOR Mays, Francine; Imel, Susan
TITLE Adult Learning Disabilities. Overview: ERIC Fact Sheet No. 9.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, Ohio.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE [82]
NOTE 4p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Adults; *Adult Students; *Educational Diagnosis; Guidelines; *Individual Characteristics; *Learning Disabilities; Resource Materials; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS ERIC; Fact Sheets; PF Project

ABSTRACT

An overview of learning disabilities in adults is presented to aid in detection, diagnosis, and instruction. Following a description of learning disabilities in general, and the occurrence in adults in particular, nine observable characteristics of learning-disabled adults are discussed: (1) vision problems; (2) extraneous vocal sounds; (3) inability to match sounds to symbols or to distinguish between similar sounds; (4) confusion about sequential order; (5) inability to simultaneously integrate basic sensory channels for learning; (6) low level of frustration; (7) negative self-image; (8) poor concept of time; and (9) physical conditions resulting from metabolism problems. Recommendations for formal and informal diagnostic procedures are presented including observation, selecting an instrument, and steps to take after testing. Nine specific teaching and learning strategies are offered for working with learning-disabled adults. Two resources, upon which this fact sheet is based, are listed as available from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system. (DC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED237797

Adult Learning Disabilities.
OVERVIEW: ERIC Fact Sheet No. 9.

by

Francine Mays & Susan Imel

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult,
Career, and Vocational Education

CE800051

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

✓ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

ERIC/CE

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ERIC OVERVIEW
FACT SHEET No. 9
Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

SOME FACTS

Adults who suffer from learning disabilities demonstrate a severe disorder in at least one of the learning processes needed for proficiency in speaking, writing, reading, and mathematical skills. These disorders, which have usually persisted since birth, are not related to intellectual ability, however; learning-disabled adults are of average intelligence. The effect of the disabilities, though, is often that of severe underachievement in one or more academic areas. Individuals with learning disabilities thus usually have a history of repeated school failure, and many drop out of school as soon as they are legally able to do so. Repeated failures often cause the individual to have a poor self-concept, physical ailments, emotional disorders, marital problems, poor grooming habits, and poor motivation. Not unexpectedly, unemployment is also a common problem for adults with learning disabilities.

While learning disabilities cannot be corrected, they can be understood; and compensation can be made through appropriate education so that the adult may be able to make some academic achievements. The instructions used in the educational process should be oriented toward life skills and experiences and should be given in a one-to-one, personalized relationship.

DETECTION

Although learning-disabled adults have acquired defenses and manipulative techniques since childhood to cover up their learning problems, there are certain observable characteristics that these adults possess. The characteristics are as follow:

- *Vision problems* Vision-related problems include the inability to use eyes together; misreading beginnings, endings, or middles of words; and a decreasing ability in comprehension even with increased time spent reading or studying. In addition, the eyes may be red, watery, and crusted, and the individual may complain of frequent headaches.
- *Extraneous vocal sounds* While reading, writing, or listening, learning-disabled adults may produce vocal sounds that assist them in associating the sounds with written symbols.
- *Inability to match sounds to symbols or to distinguish between similar sounds* These symptoms can be detected through writing efforts, in which adults leave out or substitute letters or excessively erase, rewrite, or cross out.
- *Confusion about sequential order* Confusion about the sequential order of such items as days of the week, months of the year, and so forth may indicate a lack of visual memory or some disorder in the structure in which information is organized or stored.
- *Inability to simultaneously integrate basic sensory channels for learning* The adult is not able to integrate many modes of information that must be received, analyzed, and synthesized.
- *Low level of frustration* Learning-disabled adults frequently become easily frustrated as a result of stresses, strains, and frustrations of not being able to integrate sensory functions. In turn, repeated frustration contributes to a poor self-image.
- *Negative self-image* Resulting from repeated failures and lack of self-confidence caused by a world of confusion and disorder, the negative self-image is often manifested in appearance, behavior, and self-description of learning-disabled adults. Consequently, adults with learning disabilities have difficulty accepting praise about how they are performing on tasks.
- *Poor concept of time* Learning-disabled adults have a poor conception about how much time is required to complete a task and, therefore, their goals are frequently inconsistent with reality.
- *Physical conditions resulting from metabolism problems* Frequently, learning-disabled adults have physical problems resulting from an imbalance in their metabolism. These problems may contribute to inconsistent behavior and work patterns, nervous conditions, feelings of fatigue, short attention spans, and problems with complexion and hair.

DIAGNOSIS

There are a variety of diagnostic procedures, and these may be formal (using conventional assessments) or informal (observation and interview).

For the individual suspected of having a learning disability, the following should be performed:

- Observe the student and begin to formulate a hypothesis of the learning problem(s).

ERIC is sponsored by the National Institute of Education.

- Interview the student so as to gain his/her insight and motivation. The atmosphere should be one of acceptance, encouraging the student's support and trust. Questions should seek to determine the student's preferred learning setting and methods, the most difficult kinds of learning and nature of attendant learning efforts, degree of support needed in the learning setting, and self-appraisal of academic skills as well as educational and occupational goals for the adult education program sought.
- If it is felt learning problems do exist, the student's consent should be requested so that screening and diagnosis of learning strengths and weaknesses may be initiated.

The types of diagnostic instruments are those that (1) screen visual and auditory functions, (2) assess academic abilities, and (3) identify learning strengths and weaknesses. Care must be used to select the most appropriate diagnostic tool and to interpret test results accurately. After testing, the following should be done:

- Feedback about test results should be shared with the student immediately. Examiners should give an overview of what they see as being the student's general areas of difficulty.
- The information gained from the diagnosis should be used to develop a learning plan. Specific information should be included about how the adult processes information and what the learning activity goals are. This plan will help determine which materials to select for use, what modes of input to use, and how to help the student integrate the processing and evaluation of new information within the environmental conditions.
- The student's progress should be continuously observed. As necessary, the plan should be altered to help the student avoid frustrating experiences and reinforcement of a negative self-image.

STRATEGIES

Some general learning strategies recommended in working with learning-disabled adults include—

- establishing a nontraditional learning environment based upon the student's learning needs and which is informal, relaxed, and nondistracting;
- helping the student to become an active learner, using a combination of auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and tactile modes;
- allowing the student to summarize verbally what she/he has learned, thus providing for feedback from self and others on the accuracy of what has been learned;
- preparing well-planned and organized lessons that can provide the extensive structure needed by the learning-disabled adult;
- giving clear and concise instructions;
- providing pictorial examples of what is being discussed so that the student may "see" what is meant, and using tape recorders, audiovisuals, and so forth;
- keeping the discussion focused on matters relating only to the lesson during its presentation;
- making the tasks short-term and permitting short breaks between tasks, offering encouragement and taking special note of *all* successes and accomplishments;
- allowing students to do their work themselves by providing responsibility, guidance, structure, and support and, where called for, encouraging students to provide their own materials, ideas, and suggestions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

This *Overview* is based on information from the following two works:

Vaillancourt, B. *A Special Project for the Development of Assessment and Educational Programming Techniques Serving the Adult Basic Education Student with Learning Disabilities.* Final Report. Palatine, IL: William Rainey Harper College, 1979. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 193 433).

Weisel, L. P. *Adult Learning Problems: Insights, Instruction, and Implications.* Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University, 1980. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 193 534).

OTHER RESOURCES

Additional and related information on this subject can be found in ERIC through use of the index terms applied to the above two documents. See appropriate RIE volumes.

This Fact Sheet was written by Francine Mays and Susan Imel, ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, and edited by David Tipton.

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
1960 KENNY ROAD · COLUMBUS, OHIO 43210